

It's time for Karl Rove to go

The president needs to ask for a special prosecutor in the Valerie Plame case.

By Rep. John Conyers Jr.



Oct. 15, 2003 | Every day it becomes increasingly clear that an administration that came to Washington promising to return "honor and integrity" to the White House has lost its moral and ethical compass.

A case in point is its handling of the CIA leak investigation. From the outset it has been obvious that White House political director Karl Rove was central to efforts to discredit Ambassador Joseph Wilson and perhaps had broken the law by leaking Wilson's wife's name to the press. Yet to date, the president has not seen fit to either ask Rove to step aside or request a special counsel to pursue the case against him and his cohorts in the White House.

The case against Rove and for a special prosecutor is overwhelming.

We know that selective leaking to target political enemies is consistent with Rove's modus operandi. Associates of former President Bush have acknowledged that Rove was fired from Mr. Bush's 1992 campaign over leaking to Robert Novak. One Rove biographer, Wayne Slater, stated, "If [Rove] didn't do this, he certainly has a pattern of activity over the 15 years, 20 years that I've known him where he has done similar things." James Moore, another Rove biographer, tells us, "If Mr. Rove is not involved [in the leak], I'll eat the paperback copy of my own book because this is a guy who controls everything, and he has a history of ... using other operatives to get things done."

We know that at a minimum, Rove and the White House perpetrated an after-the-fact smear campaign after Wilson's wife was outed. A Republican congressional staffer admitted that the administration's political strategy for dealing with Wilson and his wife was to "slime and defend." It has also been reported that Rove told MSNBC's Chris Matthews that Wilson's wife and her undercover status were "fair game." White House sources responded by asserting that Rove had merely told the press "it was reasonable to discuss who sent Wilson to Niger." Either way, it seems Rove used the power of the White House to damage Wilson and his wife.

We know that Attorney General John Ashcroft has an irreconcilable conflict of interest in any investigation involving Rove. Ashcroft paid Rove's firm an eye-popping \$746,000 for consulting on his Senate and governor's races. Rove also used his influence to ensure that Ashcroft's political career was resuscitated from his ignominious Senate defeat when he was picked as attorney general.

We know the Justice Department investigation is already veering badly off course. On Sept. 30, the Justice Department gave the White House 11 hours' notice before it launched its investigation. FBI officials have

admitted they will go a "bit slower on this one just because it is so high-profile." On Oct. 7, the White House declared that it would screen material for "relevance" before turning over staff documents to the FBI, and was weighing the assertion of executive privilege to avoid turning over other materials.

It's not a good sign when a president who initially declared that "I want to get to the bottom of this," has already retreated to a dismissive "This is a large administration, and there's lots of senior officials ... I have no idea whether we'll find out who the leaker is."

Against this backdrop of public information, it is incumbent to ask how can the president not recognize that it is in the best interests of this country for Rove to step aside? Even if a criminal case cannot be established, doesn't he understand that using the prestige and stature of the White House to target a man who merely told us the truth about Iraq's lack of nuclear capability is both immoral and reckless? Is it so difficult to understand that political expediency does not justify jeopardizing a woman's career and physical safety, or undermining our intelligence operations?

We all would have been better off had President Nixon dismissed Haldeman and Ehrlichman at the outset of Watergate, before the massive cover-up ensued. Certainly the nation would have benefited from a single continuous independent review of that scandal, rather than enduring the Saturday Night Massacre. If the administration fails to quickly take action to remove Rove and appoint a special counsel, it will be sending us down the same unfortunate path of that third-rate burglary more than 30 years ago.

About the writer

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